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Developmental Assignments

A Guide for SES Candidates

United States
Office of
Personnel
Management

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September 1981

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Although this booklet was written for SES Candidates, it should also be useful to executives and managers who supervise developmental assignments and management development program participants who seek similar assignments.

The author wishes to thank the former SES Candidates, Federal Executive Developmental Program graduates, executive development staff in other agencies and OPM staff, especially in EPG, who contributed their time and counsel in producing this guide.

Clearinghouse publication for the Federal Executive Development Community

Developmental Assignments

A Guide for SES Candidates

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"Two months in advance I had personally gone to a Senator's Office, and had given them a date I wished to come to work. In all honesty, they were not overly "excited" about my coming but indicated their willingness to "give it a try," and consented to my arrival date. On the Friday before I was to appear at their office on Monday, I called as a final reminder; I was informed 1) they had no office space for me, 2) they had no desk for me, 3) they had no project for me, 4) please don't come."

Former SES Candidate
now in the SES

"I sought out the developmental assignment and sold the "Boss To Be" on its merits. When the Boss' Deputy got scheduled for a long term training assignment, I almost squatted in his chair, resulting in my being detailed to the position for three months. The job was the day-to-day management of over 700 people charged with administrative support of the agency. It was the ideal developmental assignment."

Richard A. Greenstein
Internal Revenue Service

Introduction

You and every other participant in an SES candidate development program must prepare and implement an individual development plan. At the heart of this plan will be one or more developmental assignments—special work experiences chosen to strengthen your competence to perform well in an executive position.

The value of your work experience will depend on the care and thought given to planning, arranging and completing the assignment. This Guide is a means of sharing with you the perspective on developmental assignments of many executive development program participants, coordinators, supervisors, and OPM staff members. Their advice may help you to take full advantage of the opportunity for growth which developmental assignments represent.

A developmental assignment consists of the temporary performance of another job to acquire or perfect skills and to gain new knowledge and perspective. Some examples are:

—acting for a senior executive

—shadowing a senior executive

—leading or being a member of a task force or research project

—working in a State or local government

There are seven action phases in planning and completing a developmental assignment successfully. Seven individuals or groups have roles in the success of the venture. This booklet will guide you through the seven phases and your interaction with the others who will contribute to the attainment of your developmental assignment objectives. You should also read the companion booklet to this publication, *Individual Development Planning Guide for SES Candidates*, (XD-11) which describes the complete IDP process. It was published by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Executive Personnel Group (EPG). It should be available through your Executive Resources Board support staff or executive development coordinator.

The following chart shows the action phases and actors.

SUCCESSFUL DEVELOPMENTAL ASSIGNMENTS: ACTION PHASES AND ACTORS

ACTION PHASES	ACTORS						
	Candidate	Supervisor	Senior Advisor	Executive Resources Board	Host Supervisor/ Organization	Executive Development Coordinator	Personnel Office
Setting objectives	✓	✓	✓	✓		0	
Preparing to leave your organization	✓	✓	0	0		0	0
Targeting your assignment	✓	0	✓	✓	✓	0	0
Negotiating the assignment	✓	0	0	0	✓	0	
Preparing for your performance appraisal	✓	0	0	0	✓	0	0
Accomplishing the assignment	✓		0		✓		
Returning to your regular job and giving evaluations	✓	✓	✓	✓		0	0

✓ = Prime Actors
0 = Supporting Actors

Setting Objectives

The first phase involves relating your developmental needs to your organization's future executive needs and setting personal developmental objectives. Then you need to decide which objectives you want to address by means of a developmental assignment. The best way to proceed is through the individual development planning process.

Thinking through a well-designed Individual Development Plan (IDP) will take time and work. Filling out the IDP form will walk you through the analysis step-by-step and produce specific developmental objectives which you need to address. Another benefit of the IDP process is that it helps you consider all options for satisfying your developmental needs. Some, like formal non-Governmental training, can be very expensive while others which can produce the same or better results are more cost effective. Developmental assignments frequently fall into the latter category.

For those of you who have not yet completed an IDP, a brief summary of the process is included at this point. If you have already derived clear objectives for your planned developmental assignment, go on to phase 2.

> *"After identifying an area I wanted to work in (welfare reform), I determined which unit in Government was currently most active in welfare policy research and development (HEW's Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation). I arranged my first assignment there, which provided in-depth exposure to the subject and numerous contacts in other agencies, congressional staff, White House staff and interest groups. These contacts led to the assignments which followed, all of which added up to the broadest involvement possible in welfare reform during the FEDP period."*
>
> Bob Heim
> Department of Health and Human Services

The individual development planning process includes the following steps:

a. Contact staff and line executives, your senior advisor, and your executive development coordinator to gather information about your organization's future executive needs and its specific SES candidate program requirements.

b. Identify your target position(s).

c. Identify the competencies needed for the position(s).

   1) First, executive/managerial competencies. In the section below, "Targeting your Assignment", there is a chart showing six executive activity areas with illustrative competencies. Executive Resources Board (ERBs) use these six activity areas in designing programs to provide their SES candidates with the necessary Government-wide executive competencies. You should plan your IDP in accord with this general framework, specifying competencies as they appear in your target position(s).

   2) Second, technical/professional competencies. This may not be necessary if you are certain you already possess all the required technicial competencies.

d. Check those competencies which you do not fully possess or which you would like to strengthen. The SES candidate development program provides an opportunity to prepare for transition to the executive role. Bear in mind that although both mid-level and executive level work include responsibilities in the activity areas listed, at the executive level the scope is greater, perspective required is broader, interpersonal contacts are at a higher level, involve greater negotiating skills and are a larger part of the job.

"I did not elect to take an interagency assignment, as circumstances evolved which placed me in a lengthy detail to a higher position which was invaluable in my development. I feel that has certain merits, as it affords one an opportunity for increased breadth and depth of experience in one's own discipline, but admittedly lacks the broadening of horizons that would accrue from exposure to another agency, or in a similar position in the private sector."

Marvin O'Rear
Veterans Administration

e. Define specific developmental objectives for the competencies you checked. Try to state the particular knowledge, skill, or performance ability you want to acquire, at what level or quality, and for use under what conditions or circumstances.

f. Discuss your assessment of your developmental objectives and the organization's requirements with your supervisor, your senior advisor, and your Executive Resources Board. Get feedback also from others who know you well and whose judgment you respect and modify your objectives as seems appropriate.

g. Plan the best way to satisfy these developmental objectives through a mix of formal training, independent study, and developmental work assignments within the framework of your organization's SES candidate development program. Discuss and obtain approval of the specific developmental activities with your supervisor, senior advisor, and Executive Resources Board.

Preparing To Leave Your Organization

Begin early your preparations to leave your organization. Some of the issues you and your supervisor need to discuss and resolve are: who will pay your salary during the developmental assignment, the length and dates of the assignment, the content of your job when you return and who will prepare your staff for the change. Your senior advisor, executive development coordinator, and the ERB can provide counsel as necessary on these matters. Since your absence is a developmental opportunity for someone else, it is appropriate that you take the lead in making it happen. In arranging for someone to take over your job, some options you and your supervisor might consider are:

—move someone in the unit up or rotate your staff through it,

—divide up the job and assign it to your staff with one person the acting supervisor,

—arrange to offer it as a developmental assignment to someone outside the unit, possibly even another SES Candidate.

Even if an outsider is coming in, arrange to return for interim meetings so that you don't return as a stranger to events. And since your supervisor will probably carry a bigger load in your absence, point this out to his or her supervisor so that extra efforts can be recognized, especially at performance appraisal time.

To document an assignment of thirty days or more, ask your supervisor to initiate an SF-52, "Request for Personnel Action". This will result in an SF-50, "Notification of Personnel Action" being placed in your official Personnel Folder. To document assignments of less than thirty days, simply update your SF-171.

Targeting Your Assignment

Having identified the objectives for a developmental assignment during the IDP process, you are now ready to begin your search for an appropriate assignment.

Experience has shown that while the ERB, your senior advisor and your supervisor share in planning and arranging your developmental assignment, you must be prepared to be the prime mover in the process.

Enlist the help of your senior advisor from the beginning both in identifying possible organizations and contacts, and in deciding the best places to search. With their experience and contacts, senior advisors can be of great help in finding and setting up successful developmental assignments. You can't expect your advisor to start from zero so help him or her with leads or directions. A publication which will give you background information on the roles of a candidate and the senior advisor is *The Relationship Between an SES Candidate and a Senior Advisor/Mentor*, (XD-8) published by OPM, EMDD, (202) or FTS 632-4661.

> *"Top level assistance in arranging executive assignments outside one's own agency is essential. My agency director used his contacts on Capitol Hill and at the Pentagon to arrange two highly profitable assignments for me. My job was made easier and the assignments were more worthwhile because of his personal assistance and attention."*
>
> Federal Executive Development Program IV Participant

To target your asignment, begin by listing those experience areas where you have proven strengths. These are your skills to barter with prospective organizations for an opportunity to work on your less developed skills. You should also list very specifically the skill areas in which you are looking for opportunities. Knowing which competencies you already possess in strength and knowing what competencies you want to get out of an assignment will be important when talking to a potential host supervisor. You should be able to say, "Here is what I want to get out of this assignment," and "Here is what I will give you in return."

Next, working with your senior advisor, define in general terms two, three or more possible kinds of assignments which could incorporate most of your objectives. Set a tentative length of time for each possible assignment, and possible dates which would fit in with your schedule. Describe the kind of organizational location and type of work you seek.

In defining possible developmental assignments, look first to your most serious needs, especially those involving skill building. Skills are "doing things" rather than just "knowing things".

A difficult question is how far afield from your previous experience you want your assignment to be. Candidates who have been able to find radically new experiences have profited greatly from them. But they are hard to land and the trend has not been in this direction. Experience has shown that few developmental assignments are perfect fits to candidates' needs. Following this process should make the fit as close as is possible.

Some former SES Candidates believe that to be effective in developing executive competencies, an assignment should last at least three months and be full time. They maintain that with one month to know the new agency or office and another month to get into the assignment, three to six months are needed to get any really valuable experience.

Part time assignments have not worked very well because candidates were really working two jobs and could do neither very well. If you are considering a part-time assignment, establish the expectations for both jobs and the time schedules for both.

The two charts which follow may be helpful in defining the type of assignment you want.

ASSIGNMENTS MATCHED TO EXECUTIVE ACTIVITY AREAS

Executive Activity Areas	More Detailed Activities Which an SES Member Should be Competent to Perform	Developmental Assignment Which May Provide the Needed Competencies
Integration of Internal and External Program-Policy Issues This area involves seeing that key national and agencywide goals, priorities, values, and other issues are considered in making decisions about the programmatic-technical work of the organizational unit.	Identifying and integrating key issues (e.g., political, economic, social technological, organizational, public interest, clientele preferences) within and outside of the agency, relevant to the work of the organizational unit. Working with and through the national policy making-implementation structure and processes (e.g., Presidential leadership and political positions, OMB oversight-directives, legislative procedures-processes, judicial review), and as relevant, other governmental jurisdictions and processes (e.g., State and local, other nations, international organizations).	Assignment as special assistant at the executive level or to task force working on writing policy or programs which deal with those issues at a bureau or higher level. Assignment to organizations whose mission requires a different or greater awareness of and sensitivity to these issues. Assignment on the Hill or to an agency Congressional relations office. Assignment to an organization that requires frequent interaction with client groups.
Organizational Representation and Liaison This area focuses upon the external communications aspects of executive positions, serving as a key representative-spokesperson for the organizational unit and/or agency and inter-unit/organization coordinator.	Representing and speaking for the organizational unit and its work (e.g., presenting, explaining, selling, defending, negotiating) to persons and groups within and outside of the agency (e.g., agency heads and other political and career executives, OMB, Congressional members—staff-committees, the media, clientele and professional groups). Establishing and maintaining working relationships with other agency units (e.g., other program areas and staff support functions) and external groups and organizations (e.g., other agencies and governments, Congress, clientele groups, etc.). Working in groups and teams, conducting briefings and other meetings. Seeing that reports, memos, and other documents reflect the position and work of the organizational unit.	Assignment to an office that regularly makes formal public presentations, or expects to prepare and present congressional testimony during the assignment period. Assignment to a new or reorganizing organization with the task of developing procedures to improve working relationships with outside organizations. Assignment as a special assistant to a key policy executive, with responsibility for drafting speeches, preparing the executive for question and answer sessions, and participating in negotiations. Assignment to an interagency task group.
Direction and Guidance of Programs, Projects, or Policy Development This area involves activities related to establishing program-policy goals and the structure and processes necessary to carry them out.	Direction and guidance for: Planning processes and decisions—setting goals, objectives, and priorities; integrating short and long term goals; identifying contingencies strategies, resources needs. Assessing program, policy, project feasibility. Setting effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity standards. Organizing structure and work.	Assignment to a new organization that is dealing with these issues, or an old organization that is reexamining these issues because of a reorganization. Assignment to an office specializing in productivity, performance appraisal or evaluation.

ASSIGNMENTS MATCHED TO EXECUTIVE ACTIVITY AREAS—Continued

Executive Activity Areas	More Detailed Activities Which an SES Member Should be Competent to Perform	Developmental Assignment Which May Provide the Needed Competencies
Acquisition and Administration of Financial and Material Resources		
This area concerns activities and procedures related to obtaining and allocating the financial and material resources necessary to support the organizational unit.	Managing the budgetary process—preparing, justifying, operating through organizational and congressional procedures, administering. Overseeing procurement-contracting procedures and processes. Directing-coordinating logistical operations.	Assignment to an organization during budget planning time at a sufficiently high level for exposure to congressional procedures. Assignment to an organization that forsees more than the average procurement activity during the assignment period.
Utilization of Human Resources		
This area involves activities and processes for seeing that people are appropriately employed, dealt with fairly and equitably, and effectively and efficiently utilized.	Acquiring staff through appropriate staffing processes—workforce planning, recruitment and selection, including affirmative action and EEO. Delegating work among subordinate groups and individuals. Conducting performance appraisals and providing appropriate rewards and/or disciplinary action. Assessing individual capabilities and needs and providing coaching, counseling, and career development opportunities. Resolving conflicts and attending to morale and organizational climate issues.	Assignment to a supervisory job that involves assignment of many different tasks to many people. Assignment to head up a project work group with heavy workload. Assignment to training and development office or to a supervisory job in an office with high staff turnover.
Review of Implementation and Results		
This area involves activities and procedures for seeing that programs and policies are being implemented as planned and/or adjusted as necessary and that the appropriate results are being achieved.	Monitoring work status through formal and informal means. Diagnosing and consulting on problem areas relating to implementation and goal achievement. Evaluating technical and non-technical program outcomes and impacts. Assessing overall effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity of the organizational unit.	Assignment to a management or program evaluation office, an intra-office evaluation team or investigative task force or commission.

DEVELOPMENTAL ASSIGNMENTS TO BROADEN EXPERIENCE

IF YOU HAVE HAD THESE TYPES OF PAST EXPERIENCE	THESE ASSIGNMENTS MAY BE APPROPRIATE
Previous experience at the bureau or command level	An assignment to an agency headquarters policy staff or a Congressional oversight committee
Work experience primarily at the field level	A headquarters assignment
Work experience primarily at the headquarters level	An assignment as an assistant to a Chairperson of a Federal Regional Council or Federal Executive Board, or to a major operating official in the field
Work experience primarily involving administrative work	An assignment as an assistant to a line operating official
Work experience primarily in a highly specialized area (e.g., budget, finance, law, scientific research, engineering)	An assignment which provides exposure to program and management issues which cut across agency lines (e.g., MBO, OD, EEO, decentralization)
Work experience which has provided little interagency interface	An assignment to an interagency task force which provides experience in the reconciliation of a variety of interests and viewpoints (e.g., OMB reorganization task force)
Work experience which has not provided interaction with State and local jurisdictions despite the fact that the agency's mission requires that interface	An assignment to a State or local community in an area related to the agency's mission
Work experience which has not provided an exposure to the budget process	An assignment within the agency's budget function or an assignment to OMB or GAO
Work experience which has not provided an exposure to Congressional operation	An assignment in the Congress (an Oversight or Appropriation Committee or Subcommittee)
Work experience which has been primarily in one agency or in the private sector	An assignment to an interagency task force, another agency or OMB

After you have specified the competencies you want to develop during the assignment and have defined possible assignments in general terms, write a resume for use in the actual search. A resume will save you search time by getting you maximum exposure with the people you want to contact. It should contain very specifically what you want from the assignment, what you can give in return and a summary of your experience proving that you can deliver what you promise. Include proposed length of the assignment and, if appropriate, possible dates sought.

Now you are ready to search for specific opportunities for the assignment you envision.

A good starting point in your search is to identify agencies, bureaus, congressional groups, State and local governments or non-profit institutions with which your agency must deal regularly and effectively. A well located developmental assignment in such an organization can give you and through you, your agency, knowledge and contacts which will be very valuable. This kind of an assignment is easier to sell to both organizations since both are getting something valuable out of it. In the process, you will, of course, increase your value to both organizations.

"I was exceptionally pleased with my project at the Office of Technology Assessment. It allowed me to utilize my expertise in remote sensing which I had acquired while working with the Defense Mapping Agency, and as DMA's representative to NASA over the years. Essentially, it allowed me as a representative of user agencies (DMA, U.S. Geological Survey, Commerce, Agriculture) in the Executive Branch to propose a strategy to investigate the remote sensing problem and then to propose a solution for the benefit of Congress and upcoming legislation that affects the national interest and society. Through contacts with both the Senate and House Committee staffs during my presentation to them, I gained a much clearer understanding of how the Legislative Branch functions and interacts with the Executive Branch, and how together they are concerned with impacts of new technology on society."

Donald L. Light
Department of the Interior

As stated at the outset, your senior advisor can be extremely helpful in the search.

Other sources you can approach are Federal Executive Institute graduates, Federal Executive Development Program graduates, the President's Executive Exchange Program, (202) or FTS 632-6834, the LEGIS Program, (202) or FTS 653-7060, your ERB, former SES candidates and professional associations and network groups. The SES Candidate Network (SCAN) serves as a brokering mechanism for developmental assignments for its members. You can contact them at 1591 Kimblewick Road, Potomac, Maryland 20854. Through your networking contacts you might locate someone who would be interested in trading positions with you for your mutual growth.

> *"Graduates of the former Federal Executive Development Program are often sources for outside executive development assignments. My four month assignment at the State Department came about that way. A colleague from the Navy and I did a management survey of the Office of Communications at the State Department. We were given free rein to interview and learn thoroughly how the Office of Communications performs its mission of providing records and communications service to DOS world-wide. Our study took us into every nook and cranny of OC here in the Washington area. We had an excellent opportunity to learn about communications and also to study how OC manages such a widely dispersed organization: it provides communication at all the embassies abroad as well as at Main State, a real management challenge! By osmosis we also learned a lot about DOS itself. A three week trip abroad to study communications in embassies in five countries capped our assignment at DOS. A long written report described our findings and recommendations to the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Communications who had been our host."*
>
> Federal Executive Development Program IV Participant

Another source is the Executive Placement and Information Branch in OPM which receives information on SES vacancies, some of which might provide opportunities for developmental assignments, (202) or FTS 632-4625. In the regions, this information is available at the Federal Job Information Centers and OPM area offices. When an SES vacancy is used to provide a developmental assignment, the position is usually disestablished at the SES level and replaced by a GS-15 position for the duration of the assignment.

If consistent with your needs, a possibility you should definitely look into is an assignment on Capitol Hill. But before you accept a Hill assignment, talk to someone who's been there to get a sense of what you can expect from the experience.

Consider all possibilities in other organizations and your own organization, private industry, nonprofit associations, as well as State and local governments. If you find an opportunity with private industry or an association, always check with your agency's designated ethics official to avoid conflict of interest. And in State and local government assignments, be cautious in dealing with local politics and local press interviews.

As the prime searcher with you, ideally your senior advisor should make the first contacts with another agency. If neither you nor your senior advisor are successful in finding leads through personal contacts, you can send out letters of inquiry along with your resume. Follow up by telephone to determine interest and decide which leads you want to pursue. From this, a few face-to-face interviews should lead to two or three tentative offers.

Try to get a number of opportunities to pick from and then analyze them to see which one gives the most coverage to your objectives, fits in best with your schedule, and interests you most. Make your choice and contact the organization to accept the offer. Then schedule a meeting to discuss the details of the assignment.

It would be helpful if your senior advisor could find an informal mentor at your host agency, someone to make sure that people there see you in your proper role. An informal, highly-placed mentor will significantly improve the probability that your assignment will be successful.

> *"The most important and best part of an Executive Development program to me is the opportunity for assignments outside one's own Department or Agency. I think everyone should do a stint on Capitol Hill. I worked on a Senate Committee Staff during SALT II summer. Summer is usually a slow time but not the summer of 1979. What a vantage point for learning the Executive-Congressional interface! I attended hearings of my committee on SALT II and heard testimony by many high-ranking civilian and military leaders. I performed research, helped write the staff report on SALT and studied the budget process. I also learned my way around Capitol Hill, went to press briefings and hearings on anything that interested me, and visited other Government agencies for tours and briefings. I read deeply and to my edification in the Committee's extensive records holdings. I ended the summer by designing a mechanized system for handling the Committee's records—and with an understanding of Congress' relationship to us that I couldn't have gotten any other way."*
>
> Federal Executive Development Program IV Participant

Negotiating The Assignment

The most fundamental problem you face is the difference between what you will need to learn from the assignment and what the host supervisor will need to gain from you. After considerable work, you have identified your developmental work needs—what you want out of this. They are your relative weaknesses and you want opportunities to learn about these areas. The host supervisor is usually reluctant to give you too much responsibility in areas you admit are your weak spots and would prefer to use your strengths. So beware of the danger of the host supervisor collapsing the job to fit your established competencies. After all, another good hand will help his or her performance and later his or her performance appraisal. Negotiation should produce an agreement in which both of you gain some of what you both need out of it. The assignment should therefore be a combination of the duties of an incumbent of the job, that is production, and the duties of a candidate, that is growth. But you should recognize that it is probably unrealistic to expect to practice the full range of managerial responsibilities.

You should also raise the question, if it seems necessary, whether the host supervisor sees you as a representative of your home organization. Although occurring infrequently, it can burden you with an additional role which might not contribute to achieving your objectives or might, by creating a conflict of interests, interfere with your developmental process.

After you have established the possibility of an assignment, you and the host supervisor should sit down to iron out the specifics. This should include:

- —identifying duties you will be responsible for
- —outlining outcomes and expectations
- —writing standards of performance expected
- —identifying who evaluates performance and how
- —establishing who approves the agreement in each agency
- —agreeing that either party can terminate the agreement at any time if the job situation does not turn out to be as discussed
- —establishing beginning and ending dates
- —identifying whom you will report to
- —establishing who will give coaching and counseling
- —arranging for adequate orientation
- —identifying staff you'll work with and who your supervisor will be
- —establishing space you will work in
- —approving leave plans
- —identifying any travel requirements and who pays
- —agreeing on whether host agency will pay none, part of or all of your salary

Don't muddle through. It's better to spend time clarifying at the start than to begin with a fuzzy or unsatisfactory assignment. After the meeting incorporate the points of agreement in a written work plan which both you and the host supervisor sign. This plan can be an attachment to the IDP form and to a letter of confirmation of the assignment from you to the host organization.

> *"For someone who thought he was "expert" enough, being advised to spend a developmental assignment on Capitol Hill seemed something of a put-down. A few days in the foreign policy section of Senator Edward Kennedy's office was sufficient to correct that misapprehension. On a senator's staff, the great variety of issues, the quick response time, and the perspective are matters that have to be experienced first hand. The assignment is a vast success."*
>
> Pierce S. Corden
> U.S. Arms Control and
> Disarmament Agency

Preparing for Your Performance Appraisal

In laying the groundwork for the performance appraisal for your developmental assignment, first check with the personnel office in your home agency to find out what your agency performance appraisal plan requires. Most agencies, for example, require that you be on a developmental assignment for a minimum of 120 days before you can have a performance appraisal for merit pay purposes. They also may require that you use their forms.

You will then want to meet with your host supervisor to agree upon the standards you will be evaluated against. It will be in this discussion that you will most clearly surface the different needs of each of you—the need of the supervisor to use your established competencies to produce a product and your need for growth opportunities in the new areas. The resulting standards should reflect the previous agreement on your role and responsibilities.

The standards should cover those production oriented responsibilities where you can expect to perform. They should also reflect your growth opportunities but, and this is important, they will not describe your growth but your actual performance. For example, one of your objectives may be to increase competence in budget preparation. The supervisor will of course be unwilling to allow you to have lead responsibility in preparing their budget because of your lack of experience. But through your negotiations, you both agree that you will help in its preparation and writing. Your standards would deal with your expected performance in this activity area.

The supervisor should also write an attachment that would describe your growth in this area. The description of growth would not figure in performance appraisal determinations but would be acceptable and useful to the ERB in assessing satisfactory completion of your program.

Just as you need to document the assignment with an SF-50 you need documentation with your performance appraisal form to prove your increase in competencies.

Accomplishing the Assignment

As you begin your assignment, remember that the host supervisor has agreed to the arrangement expecting you to produce a product or manage an activity. And your performance will be judged on that basis. Give your first attention to meeting this commitment. Let it constitute the agenda of your first meeting with your host supervisor. Once you have established your genuine intention to produce as agreed upon, you can then legitimately look for the same kind of attention from the supervisor for your needs. And you are more likely to get it. Be prepared and flexible to take advantage of unexpected challenges. As long as they are consistent with your objectives, they may be more valuable than your planned opportunities.

Even though you have a written work plan for the assignment, you might have to remind your host supervisor of some of the activities. The more likely ones are:

—an adequate orientation
—periodic reviews with your host supervisor
—reclarification of your role and responsibilities when necessary
—final performance appraisal and close out session

You can help in arranging for the orientation by asking in advance for background reading.

It would be wise to arrange to have an informal evaluation once a month with the host supervisor to discuss your role and scope of duties. The evaluation should include the opportunity to renegotiate or end the assignment if it has changed substantially from the original agreement.

Schedule interim progress meetings with your senior advisor, and keep in touch with your own staff and your regular supervisor so that your reentry to your regular job will be smooth and without surprises.

In addition to the opportunity to grow in different areas, a developmental assignment offers you an experience which you can use to determine if you really want an SES job. A wise saying goes "There are two decisions in life that you make from the heart—the choice of your spouse and the choice of your job". This is a chance to listen to your feelings about an SES job and all that goes with it.

> *"I acted under a full delegation of authority in the position of Regional Director. The reasons for the success of the assignment were pre-work in Washington interviewing headquarters' personnel about the region, attendance at Regional Directors' meeting as a full-fledged participant, shadowing the Regional Director on site for two weeks, determining with the Regional Director what skills I wanted to concentrate on and a formal debriefing with the Regional Director. Finally, the Regional Director never intervened in my activities or intruded on any of my decision-making."*
>
> Faye Rattner
> Community Services
> Administration

Returning to Your Regular Job and Giving Evaluations

Shortly after your return to your organization, you will want to report to your senior advisor and the ERB. You should make appropriate evaluation reports, oral or written, to your:

—supervisor
—senior advisor
—ERB
—official personnel folder

Your evaluation report could include:

—accomplishment
—obstacles
—climate
—timing
—impact you had
—impact of the experience on your development
—carry over to your current job and your organization

Letters of appreciation to your home supervisor and your host supervisor are appropriate. Even more valuable is a letter of appreciation to your home supervisor's supervisor in which you mention the increased workload your supervisor has carried in your absence and that this ought to be considered at performance appraisal time.

In arranging your re-entry to your agency, make certain that your developmental assignment performance appraisal is included or attached to your agency performance appraisal. This could have considerable influence on your merit pay.

Finally, you have gained much new and valuable information, have developed new insights into the executive's role in Government and have established a network of contacts that will be useful to you and your organization in the future. You can begin to repay your organization for its support in helping you achieve this by sharing this information with your colleagues, the agency executive development staff and any other interested agency staff.

Checklist

To help you in setting up your assignment, this checklist contains the key actions mentioned in this booklet:

1. Setting objectives
   - —Identify organizational needs and individual developmental objectives.
   - —Discuss objectives with your senior advisor, supervisor, ERB and others; modify as necessary.
   - —Set objectives for the planned development assignment.
2. Preparing to leave your organization
   - —Discuss your plans for a developmental assignment with your supervisor and arrange for coverage of your job during your absence.
3. Targeting your assignment
   - —Specify detailed objectives for assignment and specify what you could contribute.
   - —Define possible developmental assignments in general terms.
   - —Write resume; include developmental assignment objectives.
   - —Search for assignment and interview possible host supervisors.
   - —Select and accept assignment.
4. Negotiating the assignment
   - —Negotiate details.
   - —Get signatures on work plans.
   - —Have SF-52 cut.
5. Preparing for your performance appraisal
   - —Check with your personnel office on your agency's performance appraisal plan requirements.
   - —Write performance standards with host supervisor.
6. Accomplishing the assignment
   - —Begin assignment; get orientation.
   - —Review progress periodically with host supervisor.
   - —Keep in contact with regular supervisor, senior advisor and staff.
   - —Get written final performance appraisal and description of growth.
7. Returning to your regular job and giving evaluations
   - —Give reports in agency.
   - —Send memos of appreciation.
   - —Share information in briefing.

Evaluation Form

Developmental Assignments:
A Guide for SES Candidates (XD-13)

We would very much appreciate your taking the time to complete and return this form. Your response will help us in preparing future publications. Thank you.

1. Please rate this publication as ☐ very useful, ☐ useful, ☐not useful.
   If not useful, please explain:

2. In what ways could this publication be improved (please specify, e.g., content/coverage; format; writing style; other)?

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   - ☐ SES candidate
   - ☐ Executive Resource Board (ERB) member
   - ☐ Mentor of an SES candidate
   - ☐ Personnelist
   - ☐ Executive development professional staff
   - ☐ Executive resources staff
   - ☐ Management development participant
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